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AN ANCIENT BABYLONIAN (AX-HEAD) INSCRIPTION.¹

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In April, 1903, Mr. George F. Kunz, gem expert of Tiffany & Co., New York city, showed the writer an ancient ax-head, seen in the accompanying illustration, bearing the inscription described below. It is now in the Morgan collection in the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

At the writer's request, Mr. Kunz has furnished the following description of the object:

This remarkable stone object was secured for this collection in 1902 in England. It is one of the oldest known stone objects of a weapon form with an inscription, although copper and metal objects were frequently so marked. It is historic and almost unique.

This ax was obtained by Cardinal Stefano Borgia while at the head of the Propaganda [in the eighteenth century], but whence or how is not known. The Contessa Ettore Borgia, his niece, offered it to the British Museum some ten or twelve years ago, but at so extravagant a value (about three or four thousand pounds sterling) that it was returned to her. It was ultimately acquired for some 15,000 lire by the late Comte Michel Tyszkiewicz,² and soon after his death there was a dispersal of his collection of engraved stones, bronzes, marbles, and other antiquities. After the sale, the ax was purchased for Messrs. Tiffany & Co., by the author [of these statements], and, through the generosity of James Pierpont Morgan, Esq., was presented to the American Museum of Natural History, New York city, on April 16, 1902.

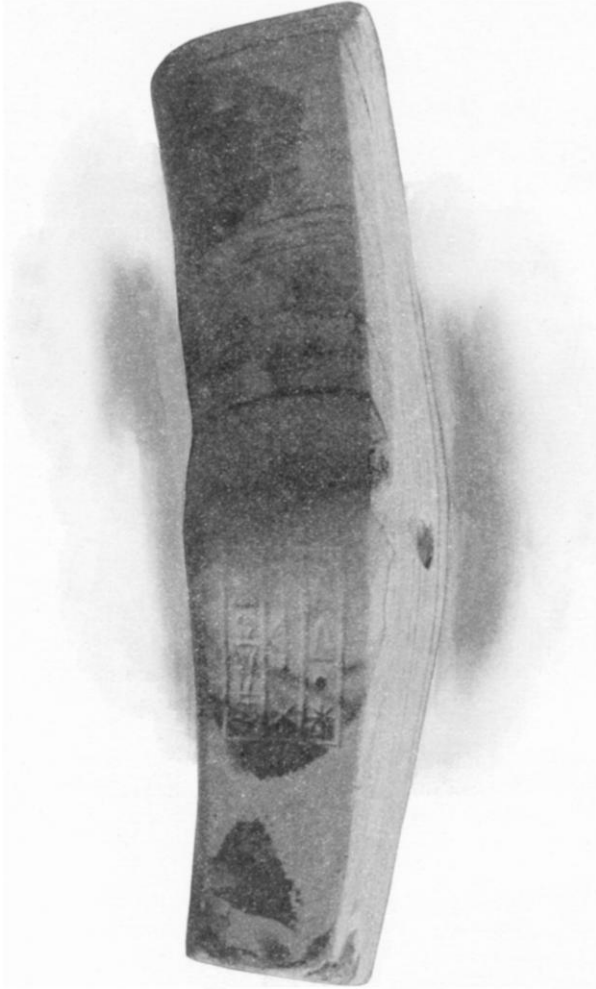
The stone itself is described by Mr. Kunz as follows:

The object measures in length 134.5 mm., width 35.5 mm., thickness 31 mm., and weighs 226.8 grams. It is made of banded agate, the layers being very parallel, so much so that it might well be called onyx. The color is snuff-brown, really a deer-brown. It is in part spotted and splashed with white, evidently due to contact either with fire, or fire and some alkali, such as soda. This *patina* covers the larger part of the inscription, and has been produced since the latter was cut. The incising was the result of bow-drill work.

¹ The most part of the accompanying article was read before the New York Academy of Science, by Mr. George F. Kunz, and appears in Bulletin XXI, Art. V, of the Museum of Natural History.

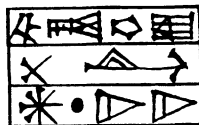
² *Collection d'Antiquités du Comte Michel Tyszkiewicz*, décrite par W. Fraehner. Paris, 1898. Plate XXXII.

This very stone object is pictured in Maspero, *Dawn of Civilization*, p. 755, where the footnotes cite some of the same facts already mentioned by Mr. Kunz. Fr. Lenormant presents a



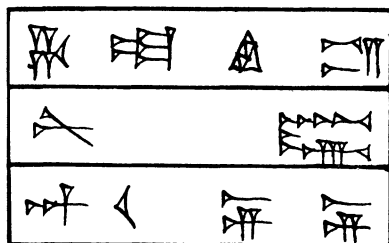
fac-simile of it in his *Tre Monumenti Caldei*, etc, Roma, 1879 (pp. 4–9, Plate VI, 1), where he attempts an interpretation of its inscription, as well as of the ax in ancient archæology. The same object has been described also in Cartailhac, *L'âge de la pierre en Asie*, in the *Troisième Congrès provincial des Orientalistes*, tenu à Lyon; Vol. I, pp. 321, 322, reproduce Lenormant's treatment of it (note in Maspero).

The little inscription that forms the subject of this note is an intaglio on the side of this banded agate ax-head (see the accompanying illustration). It occupies the space of one inch in length by five-eighths of an inch in width. It consists of three lines written in archaic Babylonian characters, of which the accompanying



cut is a fac-simile reproduction. The character of the signs is that current in Babylonia from the earliest times to 2000 B. C., both on cylinder seals and in larger inscriptions. The language is the primitive form of the cuneiform languages called "Sumerian" by one school, and by another "Akkadian." Its outstanding feature is that it is written largely in ideographs—signs that designate ideas, rather than syllables. This was the favorite method of marking important documents, or dedicating them to some particular divinity or divinities.

The accompanying cut, enlarged to twice the actual size, is a transliteration of the inscription into the later Assyrian character, the form of writing current in Assyria from 1500 to 606 B. C.



The transliteration³ of the ancient Babylonian is as follows:

HA AD-DUG-IŠ
PAP ŠEŠ
dingir U ZAL-NI

The Assyrian equivalent of the text may be indicated in the following form:

duppi Ad-dug-iš
 ašaridu
ilu Šamaš baru-šu

³ F. Lenormant, in *Monumenti Caldei ed Assiri* (Rome, 1879), Plate XIV, gives a transliteration into Assyrian of what seems to have been this inscription, but he misread the first two signs in the first line, and the first two in the third line. He finds the god Ramman, however, and gives an appropriate description of him.

The translation of the text as just transliterated is:

The inscription of Ad-dug-ish
The governor
(Dedicated) to the god Shamash, his benefactor.

This small inscription, like most of those written in the so-called Sumerian language, is capable of more than one rendering. The one presented above is based in part on a fragment of a syllabary found in *Cuneiform Texts of the British Museum*, Vol. XII, Plate 31, No. 38182. There we find $\text{HA} = \text{nu-u-nu}$ (= "fish"); du-up-pu (= "tablet" or "inscription"); pu-ra-du , whose meaning is uncertain. It is also possible to read the first line in the inscription as the proper name, thus: "Haddugish, the governor, (dedicated) to the god Shamash, his benefactor."

Another possible rendering is to take the first sign in the first line as naming a particular stone, the determinative sign usually found before such words in prose being omitted. This omission, especially before signs whose character can be otherwise determined, is frequent in the so-called Sumerian inscriptions. The syllabaries (Brünnow, No. 11822) designate a fish-stone (= *aban nûni*), which has been thought by some scholars to be *os sepiae* (= "cuttle-fish bone"). May it not be that this first sign in the first line designates a stone, which, because of its banded character, is likened to a fish, hence to be read "the (precious) stone of Ad-dug-iš," etc.?

In some of the combinations of signs where the first sign in the first line is an element (*cf.* Brünnow, Nos. 11843, 11845) we find such a meaning as "defense," "protection." It is not impossible that such a meaning may be attached to this ax-head used as a symbol of defense against an enemy. If such a sense were possible, then the last line might be read, "To the god Adad, his lord." The entire inscription would then read, "The defense of Addugish, the governor, (dedicated) to the god Adad, his lord."

It seems evident, from the usual custom in the use of such inscriptions, that the first sign should designate something relative to the object on which it is found. Hence the designation "stone," or "(precious) stone," indicated in the suggestion made above may be the true meaning for this bit of an inscription. The last line contains first the designation of a divinity, probably either Shamash or Adad, the archaic small circle being used for the usual

sign *U* in later Assyrian. Shamash seems to be appropriate, for he was the sun-god, whose warm light fed the life of man, beast, and vegetable, and made the earth bring forth in abundance to feed man and beast. The signs translated "his benefactor" might be more fully rendered by a paraphrase, "the one who supplies him with abundance." Adad was the weather god, the thunderer, who poured out the floods, and who appeared as a warrior with a weapon in one hand and a thunderbolt in the other. On seals he often leads a bull by a leash. If the god in the last line of this inscription should be read "Adad," then there may be some reason in translating the first as "defense," "weapon," making the ax-head merely a symbol of the principal attribute—the warlike one—assigned to the god Adad. The last two signs may then be read as "his lord," "his conquering one," etc.

An alternative reading for the inscription would then be:

The (ax-head) stone of Ad-dug-ish
the governor,
(dedicated) to the god Adad, his lord.

"The governor" was a "leader" or a "prince" of the first rank in authority. In fact, it is an epithet which some of the divinities attribute to themselves as indicative of their rank. Therefore this ax-head was the possession of an official of high authority—and of one who was devoted to his god as his benefactor, or his conquering lord.

Regarding the use of the ax in old Babylonia, Dr. William Hayes Ward says (in the *Bulletin* above referred to):

Axes or celts, whether of stone or copper, are extremely rare from the region of primitive Babylonia, although celts are not infrequent in Asia Minor. The ax was, however, perfectly well known from the earliest times in Babylonia, and is figured both on the cylinders and on bas-reliefs. On a cylinder in the Berlin Museum (*V. A.* 243) the three weapons more usual on the cylinders are drawn, in the field, side by side, between two standing figures.

This is the usual appearance of the ax on the cylinders, but it is not a frequent weapon, the poniard, and especially the club, being more frequent. In DeClercq's *Catalogue raisonné*, Plate 21, Ramman is figured with a weapon [like this].

In the archaic "Stèle of Vultures" of about 4000 B. C., or earlier, is a figure of a king seated in his chariot, carrying a quiver with arrows, and what may be a peculiar bow, but looks more like a boomerang.

Following him are his soldiers armed with spears and battle-axes (De Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, Plate 3 *bis*; see also Plate 5 *bis*, 3*b*). But that the double ax was known is shown by a terra-cotta votive ax (*ibid.*, Plate 45, 5).

In the bas-relief of Naram-Sin, king of Agade, in Babylonia, generally supposed to have reigned about 3750 B. C., the king is armed and followed by his soldiers, who are armed, in part, with axes. For the shape of the axes, see De Morgan's *Délégation en Perse*, Vol. I, p. 150.

Babylonian axes are not to be found, I think, in the art after perhaps 3000 B. C., until we come down to the axes of the northern region, which came in with the two-edged *bipennis* ax carried by Adad, or the chief god of the Hittite region. There it was a frequent object, and is found in Cretan art.

Among the cylinders showing the ax is that of the goddess attacked under a tent-tree (De Sarzec, *Découvertes en Chaldée*, Plate 30 *bis*, 17 *B*).

In the case of the "British Museum Migration Scene" two of the men carry an ax on their arm.

Dr. Ward's opinion of the prevalence and use of the ax in primitive Babylonia would seem to indicate that the last translation given above, wherein "Adad" is taken for the reading of the god in the third line, is the preferable one. Then the first word is most probably to be read as ax-head. It is not impossible that the word *pu-ra-du*, cited from the British Museum Texts, may have "ax-head" for its meaning.